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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)



Report

Eighth meeting of the Executive Committee Amman, 23-24 December 2021

Summary

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its eight meeting in Amman on 23 and 24 December 2021. Agenda items included following up on the recommendations made by the Committee at its seventh meeting, reviewing the reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies and technical cooperation activities for 2021, and discussing the proposed programme plan for 2023.

The Committee discussed regional and international issues, such as regional preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, and the outcomes of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021. It examined several tools and applications developed by ESCWA, such as the Arab SDG Gateway, the Arab Trade Gateway, and the toolkit to support countries in designing integrated social policies.

The present report summarizes the discussions under each agenda item, and sets out the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-3	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. Recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its eighth meeting	4-6	3
A. Recommendations to ESCWA member States.....	5	3
B. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat	6	4
II. Topics of discussion	7-62	5
A. Follow-up issues.....	7-18	5
B. Overview of ESCWA policy tools and e-portals.....	19-34	8
C. Regional and global issues	35-51	12
D. Programmatic issues	52-60	16
E. Date and venue of the ninth meeting of the Executive Committee	61	17
F. Other matters	62	18
III. Adoption of the recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its eighth meeting	63	18
IV. Organization of work	64-68	18
A. Venue and date	64	18
B. Opening	65-66	18
C. Participants	67	19
D. Agenda and organization of work	68	19
Annexes		
I. List of participants.....		20
II. List of documents		23

Introduction

1. At its twenty-eighth session, held in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 320 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference to empower it to facilitate direct communication between the ESCWA secretariat and member States on regional development and economic and social issues, and to submit resolutions directly to the Economic and Social Council, if necessary.
2. The Executive Committee held its eighth meeting in Amman on 23 and 24 December 2021. Agenda items included following up on the recommendations made by the Committee at its seventh meeting, reviewing the reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies and technical cooperation activities for 2021, and discussing the proposed programme plan for 2023. The Committee also discussed regional and international issues, such as regional preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, and the outcomes of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021. It examined several tools and applications developed by ESCWA, such as the Arab SDG Gateway, the Arab Trade Gateway, and the toolkit to support countries in designing integrated social policies.
3. The present report summarizes the discussions under each agenda item, and sets out the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

I. Recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its eighth meeting

4. At the closing session of its eighth meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the following recommendations on items set out in the meeting agenda.

A. Recommendations to ESCWA member States

5. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:
 - (a) Welcome the efforts made by the ESCWA secretariat pursuant to the recommendations made at its seventh meeting, held online on 21 December 2020;
 - (b) Welcome the activities implemented by the ESCWA secretariat within the framework of technical cooperation services provided to member States, and emphasize the importance that requests for technical cooperation submitted to the ESCWA secretariat follow a clear plan that reflects countries’ development priorities, while maintaining the flexible nature of technical cooperation in responding to emerging issues;
 - (c) Hold regular coordination meetings of national stakeholders involved in ESCWA activities, as needed, to inform them of the technical cooperation services provided; and ensure that beneficiaries of ESCWA services undertake assessments of those services;
 - (d) Emphasize the importance of the interactive and smart tools and platforms developed by ESCWA, and its efforts to enhance communication and dissemination of knowledge in ways that maximize the use of its outputs to support decision-making in Arab countries;
 - (e) Take note of the report and key messages of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021, held online from 29 to 31 March 2021, and of preparations for the 2022 edition;
 - (f) Complete the establishment and update of national platforms for reporting on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators, continue to work on effective national mechanisms to improve data flows within the statistical system, and ensure the quality and timely dissemination of data;

(g) Utilize and promote the use of tools created by ESCWA to support the development of integrated national financing frameworks, and to calculate the cost of implementing national development plans and the SDGs;

(h) Emphasize the importance of the Arab Trade Gateway developed by ESCWA, especially the window for data on trade flows, given its importance in advancing regional economic integration and promoting bilateral trade, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which demonstrated the vital role of intra-Arab trade; and welcome country efforts to promote regional cooperation and share successful experiences in that area;

(i) Continue to leverage the analyses, findings, recommendations and services provided by the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies and the Regional Knowledge Hub under the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR) in the field of climate change, and the ESCWA secretariat's efforts to support Arab countries in the field of financing climate action; and strengthen regional cooperation in those areas;

(j) Take note of the regional preparatory process coordinated by ESCWA to support least developed member States in preparing for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, developing elements of a common vision of the opportunities and challenges of the decade 2021–2030, and including them as one of the official inputs of the Conference;

(k) Adopt the recommendations by ESCWA subsidiary bodies set out in the following reports:

- (1) Reports of the Committee on Transport and Logistics on its twentieth and twenty-first sessions;
- (2) Report of the Committee on Trade Policies in the States Members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on its first and second sessions;
- (3) Report of the Committee on Financing for Development in the States Members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on its first session;
- (4) Report of the Statistical Committee on its fourteenth session;
- (5) Report of the Committee on Technology for Development on its third session;
- (6) Report of the Committee on Social Development on its thirteenth session.

(l) Welcome the proposed ESCWA programme plan for 2023.

B. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat

6. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Continue to support member States in dealing with and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, and from emerging crises and disasters;

(b) Hold bilateral meetings with interested member States on the technical support provided by ESCWA, particularly on the tools that it has developed, and stimulate national debate on identifying and prioritizing technical cooperation activities;

(c) Strengthen and leverage technical support in economic and social areas by intensifying efforts to disseminate knowledge of services that can be requested from ESCWA;

(d) Continue to support member States in collecting SDG indicators and reporting progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; complete the development of the Arab SDG

Gateway, particularly the “Leave no one behind” window to identify the categories to be targeted accurately; and consider developing a window for monitoring policies that can contribute to achieving the SDGs;

(e) Complete the financing window of the Arab SDG Gateway as an important tool to support national efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, and an effective channel for developing integrated national financing frameworks; prioritize addressing the worsening debt situation in the Arab region, and propose ways to ameliorate it; and work to take advantage of innovative means of financing, such as Islamic financing;

(f) Develop further the Arab Trade Gateway, update the classifications in the trade flows window when possible, ensure that national data are constantly updated on all platforms, and provide technical support in this area;

(g) Focus on the special needs of countries undergoing or affected by conflict or crisis, take them into account at the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2022, and intensify efforts to support the institutional capacity of member States in the face of risks and crises;

(h) Strengthen the production of knowledge, data and analyses on the impact of climate change on water resources, food security and livelihoods in Arab countries; use that knowledge to propose appropriate recommendations, programmes and policies to adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change at the regional and national levels; and continue working on the Climate/SDGs Debt Swap and Donor Nexus Initiative;

(i) Continue to support entrepreneurs in promoting the micro, small and medium business sector to create decent jobs for Arab young people;

(j) Work to operationalize the elements of the common vision of the least developed member States of ESCWA for the coming decade, set out in preparation for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries;

(k) Strengthen cooperation among member States, and continue to make use of successful experiences and practices to ensure that the capacity and efficiency of national institutions are strengthened;

(l) Intensify efforts to support the vision of the State of Palestine on economic disengagement from occupation, including monitoring Israeli policies, assessing their impact on development, developing national policies to achieve disengagement, and strengthening the capacity of Palestinian institutions, particularly in the area of service delivery.

II. Topics of discussion

A. Follow-up issues

1. Recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its seventh meeting (Agenda item 3)

7. With reference to document E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/3, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat presented progress in activities undertaken by the secretariat pursuant to recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its seventh meeting (online, 21 December 2020). For each recommendation, he outlined the actions taken to implement it, which included, for example, the preparation of 12 background papers on different dimensions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a policy paper on special drawing rights provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and their impact on Arab countries, and the development of the Arab SDG Monitor. He mentioned the Climate/SDGs Debt Swap and Donor Nexus Initiative that ESCWA had launched, adding that it had formed an international team of experts to activate it. ESCWA had also further developed the Social Justice Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT), and had held

regional workshops on voluntary national reviews in the Arab region and many national workshops. He gave an overview of some of the activities carried out at the national level, such as building the capacity of several Arab countries to plan in conditions of fragility; implementing the Libya Socioeconomic Dialogue project, which had resulted in several studies and analyses; and initiating a technical dialogue in Lebanon, which had led to two technical papers on the country.

8. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Oman said that, in addition to efforts by ESCWA to address the COVID-19 pandemic, a working group should be dedicated to strengthening current efforts to reduce disaster risk in general in Arab countries by sharing experiences and improving coordination. The representative of Jordan praised efforts by ESCWA at all levels, highlighting his country's establishment of the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship to prepare for the future and promote the importance of entrepreneurship for young people, and its formulation of relevant policy and launch of an innovation and entrepreneurship centre with the support of ESCWA, stressing the need to activate youth incubators and strengthen the participation of young people and women in all plans and projects. The representative of Yemen addressed the debt that had burdened the economies of many countries in the region, particularly his own, and suggested that in the future ESCWA should promote debt swaps to finance interventions for exiting from conflict, and realizing recovery and peace. He proposed that the issue be the focus of attention at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, adding that capital flight, forced displacement and brain drain were other important issues that ESCWA needed to address. The representative of the State of Palestine expressed his desire that ESCWA would expand its activities to include a policy vision for the State of Palestine with a view to achieving economic independence, and asked why the State of Palestine had not been included in the situation assessment of the least developed countries and the relevant report, despite paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 43/178 of 20 December 1988 that granted the occupied Palestinian territory the same preferential treatment as LDCs.

9. In response, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA stressed the importance of the debt issue because it applied to all Arab countries regardless of their gross domestic product (GDP). She underlined that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCWA and other regional organizations had urged financial institutions and donor States to ease the debt burden, and that the IMF had arranged special drawing rights which provided additional resources to support Arab countries' reserves without affecting their public debt, as these rights were not debt but rather additional liquidity support. A video was presented outlining what those rights were and how Arab countries could benefit from them. The Executive Secretary then reminded participants that ESCWA had called for the establishment of a regional solidarity fund to support the Arab LDCs in responding to the pandemic. She suggested that States that did not use their drawing rights because they did not need them should transfer part of their share to the regional solidarity fund to support countries most in need, as recovery from the pandemic was impossible without national, regional and international solidarity.

10. In response to the representative of Jordan, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA noted the importance of youth entrepreneurship for the stability of Arab societies in the coming decade, stressing the need to create decent jobs to enhance young people's contribution to the economy. ESCWA had conducted a survey of the entrepreneurial environment in a number of countries, and would set up an Arabic-language platform with information on modern technologies and how to use them to launch new businesses. She said that 2022 would see the first Arab regional entrepreneurship and innovation summit for young people, which would provide them with an opportunity to network, develop their capabilities, find the right funders for their projects, and establish intraregional trade in the future. She welcomed the proposal of the representative of Oman, and confirmed that ESCWA was keen to respond to the economic and social repercussions of disasters regardless of their nature. With regard to the intervention by the representative of the State of Palestine, she underlined that ESCWA monitored all Israeli policies affecting the Palestinian economy, and on that basis would identify the economic sectors that could be disengaged from the Israeli economy to make the most of them and drive economic growth.

2. Technical cooperation activities in 2021
(Agenda item 4)

11. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed progress in implementing technical cooperation activities in 2021 on the basis of document E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/4, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic was at the centre of many of these activities. The main areas of cooperation were supporting efforts to track the recovery, getting back on track towards achieving the SDGs, supporting an integrated pandemic response, supporting States in leveraging new technologies, shifting towards sustainable energy, and supporting the recovery of national institutions, especially in conditions of fragility. He underscored that the technical work of ESCWA continued to develop, and that the basic criteria for cooperation requests were: relevance, sustainability, integration and partnership. Relevance consisted of ensuring that requests for cooperation supported national development agendas or were linked to international commitments; sustainability meant ensuring that requests achieved national ownership, a multiplier effect and knowledge transfer; and partnership and integration consisted of ensuring that requests were linked to a project funded by the United Nations Development Account, or that there was cooperation with other relevant international, regional and national organizations. He stressed that, while planning its activities, ESCWA was keen to avoid duplication and to build partnerships through the assistance provided. He reminded participants that progress had been made in technical cooperation activities over the previous year, and that ESCWA had activated mechanisms to implement, monitor and follow up on technical cooperation requests.

12. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Oman noted the possibility of including additional data to the document in the future, such as the amount of the annual budget for technical cooperation programmes and the sources of the budget, together with the number of participants in capacity-building activities and the breakdown of beneficiaries by country, so as to illustrate the impact and effectiveness of cooperation programmes. He added that there should be less reliance on emergency requests, with more use of advance planning and a certain proportion of activities dedicated to emerging needs. The representative of the State of Palestine said that current social conditions and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic had shown that economic policies and institutional structures had failed to deal with emerging challenges, and that there must be a balance in the implementation of cooperation projects, with increased work in economic areas to promote interlinkages between economic, social and institutional dimensions. He requested that the ESCWA secretariat support State focal points in holding national technical cooperation workshops aimed at harmonizing the visions of various national actors. He also stressed that duplication needed to be avoided between regional cooperation activities and those of United Nations entities operating at the national level, and that the process for assessing support needed to be improved.

13. The representative of Jordan said that extrabudgetary activities might sometimes be inconsistent with priorities, as they focused largely on climate and women's issues. The representative of Iraq said that the technical cooperation request form should be aligned with the coordination mechanism put forward at the Technical Cooperation Network meeting. The representative of Yemen said that technical cooperation activities should be divided into planned activities agreed upon with each country, and rapid response activities to address countries' needs in view of the current rapidly changing exceptional circumstances, as doing so would provide the financial resources necessary to provide greater assistance. He also requested that ESCWA provide support for the development of an economic, social and institutional vision of peace as a road map for the future of Yemen.

14. In response, the ESCWA Executive Secretary agreed with the representative of Oman that the next report should include data on the beneficiaries of regional or national workshops, and shared his position on urgent and often random requests, noting that ESCWA either declined to perform them if they were outside its scope of work and priorities, or alternatively directed interested parties towards relevant international institutions. On the issue of the source of funding, she noted that assistance by ESCWA to member States was not limited to the technical cooperation budget and, if necessary, could be covered through the regular budget and cooperation mechanisms with other United Nations organizations to reduce burdens and costs. ESCWA was keen to take geographical distribution into account in the technical cooperation budget, including helping

countries that had not applied for cooperation activities and proposing areas for technical assistance. She added that there were four budgets: the regular budget, the technical cooperation budget, the Development Account budget, and external funds from donors.

15. The Executive Secretary then stressed that extrabudgetary activities had largely turned to the climate because of global interest in the issue, particularly in the Arab region, which was experiencing desertification and water scarcity. She said that ESCWA had surveyed all Arab countries' development plans and compared them with SDG priorities, and that the Arab SDG Gateway would allow countries to identify each other's priorities. With regard to the national socioeconomic vision in Yemen, work would hopefully be launched soon.

3. *Progress in administrative reforms in ESCWA* (Agenda item 5)

16. The Executive Secretary reviewed progress in administrative reforms since 2019, based on a short film presented to participants, which indicated that progress was due to the introduction of an internal innovation strategy, a data strategy and a digital strategy; that operations at ESCWA were moving in the direction of automating pathways and the use of bots; and that, despite difficult circumstances, ESCWA had succeeded in increasing efficiency and improving the quality of its knowledge and service products. For example, the Human Resources Section had been able to reduce the period needed to post employment opportunities for consultants and contractors. ESCWA had also adopted new types of publishing and developed new user-friendly add-ons to Word, which had reduced the time needed to prepare an electronic publication from two weeks to just four hours. Translators and editors at ESCWA had used a wide range of language service applications to increase their daily productivity. ESCWA had also achieved a greater presence in both traditional media and social media. Technologies and data had been used to transform knowledge and make it available to decision makers, and studies had been transformed into interactive tools at their disposal.

17. In the ensuing discussion, participants praised the achievements of ESCWA. The representative of Jordan stressed the need to update tools and make them sustainable, and conduct necessary trainings in public administrations in the region. He asked whether the tools were open source, and whether ESCWA ensured their sustainability, updated them and conducted trainings in ever-changing competencies. The representative of Somalia expressed his hope that the expertise of ESCWA would be transferred to member States, starting with training for focal points in these countries and keeping them informed of all developments.

18. In response, the Executive Secretary stressed the importance of sustainability, tool maintenance and regular data updates, which were sometimes automatic. For example, systems based on economic, commercial and technological data from various sources, such as the Index Simulator for Policymakers in the Arab Region (ISPAR), based on data from the World Economic Forum, the World Bank or other international organizations, occurred automatically when the annual reports of those organizations were issued. She underlined that ESCWA was keen to inform national staff of how to use tools, and held training workshops to that end. All available tools would be presented to relevant national stakeholders, and focal points in each country would be invited to attend.

B. Overview of ESCWA policy tools and e-portals

1. *ESCWA toolkit to support countries in designing integrated social policies* (Agenda item 6)

19. With reference to document E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/5-E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/8/Rev.2, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed a package of policy tools designed by ESCWA in many areas, such as measuring multidimensional poverty, identifying new labour market needs resulting from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, analysing policies from a social justice perspective, and auditing institutions from a gender equality perspective. A video was presented outlining those tools, which provided easy-to-use platforms to

support integrated, evidence-based and knowledge-based social policies, including the COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker, the Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool (MAT), a diagnostic and planning tool to build urban economic resilience during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, ISPAR, PGAT and others.

20. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed the functionalities and objectives of the ESCWA Skills Monitor, which included supporting countries in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution by highlighting the skills and competencies required to keep pace, and bridging the gap between market requirements and workforce skills. The Monitor was based on preliminary data from an analysis of 2,294,000 job postings requiring 1,644,000 skills. Findings revealed that jobs in highest demand in the region were related to marketing, sales, communications and accounting, most of which were not in line with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. He added that the Monitor provided a "forest" of jobs and skills for each country with online job postings, showing the skills shared between jobs and illustrating those that needed to be acquired to move from one job to another. The Monitor also provided information on whether job postings included the needs of persons with disabilities, whether they were geared towards young people or women, and the extent to which jobs were linked to the SDGs. Countries and individuals could benefit from the Monitor.

21. With regard to the Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat said that it was another tool developed by ESCWA to guide decision makers on the best budgeting options to promote social justice and increase momentum towards achieving economic development goals. SEM provided a comprehensive measure of public social spending in the following seven areas: education, health and nutrition, housing and community facilities, labour market interventions and job creation, social protection and food security, arts, culture and sports, and environmental protection. The seven dimensions aimed to capture crucial social development priorities in the region. In almost all of them, a direct link could be established with the SDGs. He clarified that SEM classified spending by these areas and by the social groups benefiting from it, which was important since figures on total public expenditures did not provide information on how different populations benefited from expenditures and did not identify gaps. SEM addressed this lack of information by categorizing expenditures by purpose and by key beneficiaries, including children, young people, adults, the elderly, persons with disabilities, the sick, refugees and migrants (disaggregated by sex), families benefiting from financial or in-kind support, as well as society as a whole in the case of expenditure on public goods and services and investments in non-financial assets, for example, which were not limited to any specific population. He added that the monitoring framework could be adapted to each country's characteristics and needs, and allowed policy options to be simulated together with their impact on budgets and development.

22. The representative of Jordan requested clarification of what the primary data used in the ESCWA Skills Monitor were, underlining that the tool was useful not only for individuals but also for decision makers, educational institutions and public entities to invest in local and cross-border human capital. He requested that ESCWA assist in predicting specialties that would be needed in the future under various circumstances. On SEM, he noted that it was a useful tool and that the Jordanian Government had adopted it because it provided decision makers with real-time information that had never been so easily available. The representative of Yemen pointed to the need for establishing an expenditure monitor at the level of the economy as a whole and not only at the level of one of its components, and suggested that a tool be developed to bridge the economic and financial frameworks, linking budgetary allocations on the one hand and development plans, objectives and indicators on the other. The representative of Oman sought clarification on how the ESCWA Skills Monitor addressed the problem of informal sectors, which was a major challenge in Arab countries where many people worked in the informal sector and yet no complete and comprehensive statistics were available. He wondered how effective the Skills Monitor was within the framework of the tools of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to anticipate the development of the labour market. He also asked about the main objective of SEM and whether it was a tool to support a country's social welfare or the SDGs, adding that it was inaccurate to compare social expenditure in a country with international expenditure rates, as this was insufficient to identify a country's funding gaps and the effectiveness of funding. The representative of the State of Palestine suggested that ESCWA hold workshops in coordination with the focal points of relevant

countries to present and discuss all those tools, so that member States could make appropriate decisions on their applications.

23. In response, the ESCWA Executive Secretary said that the main purpose of SEM was to further social welfare and support Governments in ensuring a decent life for all citizens within the seven areas it covered. Each of those areas had its place in the SDGs, and the effectiveness of expenditures was dependent on each country, which could use SEM to compare its spending with other countries and identify imbalances, if any. SEM supported decision makers in making informed decisions and analysing their implications based on available data. She added that the efficiency of public spending was an important issue, especially in view of countries' limited financial resources, and that the tools helped decision makers follow smart spending paths. On the subject of the primary data used in the ESCWA Skills Monitor, she clarified that the data were derived from job postings published on the Internet, most of which were from the private sector.

24. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat underlined that the Skills Monitor supported Governments, decision makers and educational institutions. It was impossible to expect labour market developments in current circumstances, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that data were only available for the next year and a half; those factors had led to a focus on recurrent experiences. As for the issue of informal sectors, he clarified that the methodology ESCWA followed focused on skills rather than jobs to identify the expertise required in a given sector and country. Work was under way, in collaboration with the Qatar Foundation, to develop a scale of the degree to which artificial intelligence was linked to each job. He noted that ILO was involved in the development of the ESCWA Skills Monitor, particularly in standardizing the classification of jobs in the Arab region.

2. Arab SDG Gateway (Agenda item 7)

25. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/6](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed the Arab SDG Gateway developed by ESCWA. She said that the Gateway had various components, including the Arab SDG Monitor, the SDG Data Portal and the "Leave no one behind" scoreboard. She also mentioned supporting data tools and the E-Handbook on SDG Framework and Metadata, adding that the SDG database was a comprehensive and dynamic platform used to search all available data on the Arab region. National reporting platforms complemented the Arab SDG Monitor, and ESCWA supported countries in establishing them. She presented the platform for Egypt, showing that national platforms made it possible to compare data from international agencies with national data, and determine to what extent they were in sync. Challenges included the availability, quality and flow of data, and the failure of focal points to regularly provide the required data. She suggested that a specialized technical officer be assigned for each indicator, with whom ESCWA could communicate to improve the collection of national data and statistics. The future plan was to regularly update national platforms and support national statistical offices in completing lists of expert technical focal points, so as to improve national coordination in data flow and develop final national assessment reports.

26. Attendees commended the Gateway and its tools. The representative of Algeria asked who was responsible for entering information into the platform, for the analysis and processing of all available information and the supervision and maintenance of the platform, and suggested the establishment of a statistics mechanism at the level of member States with a single focal point with ESCWA, so as to avoid overlapping data between sectors and to ensure coordination between them. The representative of the State of Palestine discussed closing the information gap affecting the quality and effectiveness of the platform, adding that the Gateway should include a platform for monitoring policies and actions taken by States towards implementing the SDGs. The "Leave no one behind" scoreboard of the Gateway was important, and there should be a tool to help identify marginalized groups and their priorities, given limited resources. The representative of Mauritania said that his country was in the process of establishing a platform to track various indicators and objectives, and that ESCWA should strengthen the capacity of all countries to achieve that end.

27. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat supported the proposal to assign one focal point to each indicator, to be trained by ESCWA with the support of specialized agencies to share data properly. That methodology was important to ensure the production of accurate and high-quality data and statistics.

28. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed the Finance for Development platform on the Gateway, which aimed to transform the wealth of ESCWA knowledge from quantitative or qualitative analyses in technical papers into dynamic interactive tools at the disposal of member States and decision makers. He said that ESCWA was keen to ensure that those tools would not be limited to monitoring or following up on the SDGs, and should also aim to develop national estimates of the cost of achieving the SDGs and national targets. The tools should also contribute to supporting and sustaining public fiscal management, and the shift to preparing central budgets that took the implementation of the SDGs into account. They should also help monitor the ramifications of financing decisions in accordance with the synergy and interdependence model, and predict the repercussions of economic crises on development financing. Two new tools were being developed: the first to identify various sources of funding, and the second to allow for simulation of the target growth rate needed to achieve development goals, so as to mobilize the resources required to fill the funding gap.

29. The representative of Egypt asked about the intersections between private and public funding in sustainable development financing issues, and whether a platform could be provided to highlight various national projects to achieve the SDGs. The representative of Yemen noted the possibility of mobilizing local financing resources from non-tax sources, such as *zakat*, endowments and local borrowing, and asked whether those resources had been taken into account.

30. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat confirmed that national statistics were used in the simulation tool, and the interplay between public and private funding had not been considered since national strategies were developed in accordance with government-defined objectives. Funding through Islamic endowments was important in view of the recent dwindling of funding, although they had not been identified as one of the main sources of funding. Borrowing was a supportive and stimulating element of financing, and dynamic innovative models linked borrowing to a country's growth rate. On that subject, the Executive Secretary briefed attendees on the initiative of the United Nations and the Islamic Development Bank to establish an Islamic social finance fund to serve Muslim countries and countries in the region in SDG financing projects. ESCWA was in the process of developing a platform to showcase all relevant projects.

3. Arab Trade Gateway (Agenda item 8)

31. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/7](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on the Arab Trade Gateway developed by ESCWA. He said that there were difficulties in obtaining data, quantitative indicators and commercial analysis tools in the Arab region, which was one of the least integrated regions in terms of its economy and trade. That reality had prompted ESCWA to create the Gateway to support policymakers in making informed decisions, and to facilitate access to global value chains by the private sector. The Gateway consisted of platforms on market access, trade performance and trade negotiations. Those platforms in turn consisted of various components on trade agreements, competition policies, the business environment, trade costs, logistics, trade facilitation measures, economic integration, trade flows, and others.

32. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat continued the presentation by addressing the Arab region's foreign trade data platform in detail. He said that it was an interactive database available in both Arabic and English that provided integrated time series for foreign trade through data dating back to 2012, at a high degree of detail at level six of the Harmonized System, and that put forward an integrated picture of the trade performance of Arab countries. The platform provided data on the bilateral trade of Arab countries and the Arab region as a whole, as well as charts and presentation tools on trade performance according to the direction of bilateral trade within the Arab region and with countries around the world, select commodity groups,

regional trade areas and agreements with Arab countries, and the most important trading partners. Examples were given of those charts and the information and data that users could obtain from the platform.

33. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Algeria briefed the audience on his country's trade efforts, which included the development of a national strategy to promote trade, the digitization of the electronic trade register, and the establishment of platforms for national products and Algerian exporters. The representative of Kuwait noted that the portal did not address the situation of Arab countries in terms of e-commerce, a deficiency given the importance of such trade during the pandemic. Moreover, relying on level six of the Harmonized System could be unfair to some countries that had made progress. The representative of Jordan agreed, seeking recommendations to ensure that information was regularly updated. The representative of Oman stressed the need to monitor positive developments, bilateral and regional reforms and agreements encouraging bilateral trade in the region, and asked whether there were clear recommendations on customs policies. The representative of Morocco said that government authorities could make use of the portal in the future to control trade deficits.

34. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat said that the Arab Trade Gateway was still under development and that ESCWA was keen to train stakeholders on its various components. The use of level six of the Harmonized System in the Arab Trade Gateway was temporary, and was due to the fact that a number of countries were still using the old classifications. That classification was not much different from the new classification issued in 2017 and did not affect the form and quality of data available in the Gateway. He added that the Arab region lacked e-commerce data; ESCWA had carried out a survey but had received answers from only six countries, making it impossible to include relevant data in the Gateway.

C. Regional and global issues

1. Activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies (Agenda item 9)

35. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/8](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed the activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, which included the issuance of new high-resolution products for regional climate modelling for the Levant, and participation in eight sessions of the Arab Climate Outlook Forum, focusing on the outcomes of the eighth session of the Forum. He said that adaptation activities and common benefits included consultation and coordination with specialized organizations, a technical report to raise awareness of the common benefits approach, climate change mitigation activities such as the implementation of the Regional Initiative to Promote Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region (REGEND), and a seminar on possible developments in the area of blue and green hydrogen in Arab countries. ESCWA had also held activities on finance for climate action,¹³ regional capacity-development workshops on climate change negotiations, and a joint workshop for Arab agricultural experts to share information and further climate action.

36. He added that ESCWA had had a presence at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 26), where it had participated in the Arab Group Meeting and discussions on the needs of Arab countries to improve climate action. ESCWA had also participated in a number of events on the sidelines of COP 26, such as a series of discussions on the integrated management of water and climate-related risks to increase resilience, and an international dialogue on the role of Islamic financing in achieving the SDGs. COP 26 had resulted in the Sustainable Glasgow Charter and outcomes pertaining to various aspects of climate action and climate change.

37. The representative of Oman suggested that the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies should participate in the Conference of the Parties, and present its role to decision makers. Arab countries were engaged in important activities in the field of climate change, and the best model to be followed should be identified so that other countries could benefit. He asked whether the Centre had assessed the strategies developed by each country, including Oman. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stressed the

importance of addressing climate change for her country, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation, especially since the country had recently experienced droughts and water shortages. The Syrian Arab Republic had prepared an adaptation strategy under a team of all ministries to enhance its ability to leverage support from funds.

38. The representative of Egypt noted the progress her country had made in the use of renewable energy, and its hosting of COP 27 in 2022. She added that more attention should be paid to aspects of funding and loans. The representative of Algeria stressed his country's commitment to implementing the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement within its national means. Living in a healthy environment and preserving natural resources were rights of Algerian citizens enshrined in the Constitution. To that end, the Algerian Government had implemented numerous measures, such as drafting the national climate plan, which included 551 mitigation and adaptation activities; formulating legal and institutional reporting frameworks related to transparency mechanisms; building human capacity to follow up on national climate change policy activities; drafting the post-2030 energy model; developing renewable energies; implementing and expanding the Green Dam to address desertification; adopting a programme to convert 150,000 cars to liquefied petroleum gas; and developing national structures for clean energy projects such as green hydrogen. The limited means available to Algeria had left it urgently in need of support to fully adhere to the international climate change frameworks, including strengthening human and institutional capacities and adopting criteria that would enable it to correct shortcomings. The areas of need for Algeria were examining the possibility of developing forward-looking projects that would help leverage the opportunities offered by the mechanisms adopted under article VI of the Paris Agreement.

39. The representative of the Sudan noted that her country was experiencing extreme weather events, with temperatures reaching above 40°C for a long period of more than three months, and requested capacity-building on ways to update climate data. Sudanese GDP was projected to fall by 64 per cent by 2100, and the country needed support to face that challenge. The representative of Jordan praised the ESCWA Climate/SDGs Debt Swap and Donor Nexus Initiative, which his country had adopted. Greater efforts were needed to incentivize the international community and donors to accept, support and finance initiatives, and regional support was necessary to solve problems and reach the desired goals.

40. The representative of Iraq reviewed his country's participation in climate change conferences, which had led to a report with several relevant themes. He said that the Iraqi Government was preparing a "green paper", a complement to an earlier document on climate change, in partnership with the World Bank and the United Nations. ESCWA should conduct an assessment of the status and activities of ESCWA member States to maintain similar levels of progress between countries and leverage experiences. The representative of Mauritania noted the Green Wall project, which included some Arab countries and had mobilized large amounts of funding, as part of the adoption of inter-Arab projects in the field of climate change to be presented at funding forums.

41. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat said that ESCWA supported Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in hosting the upcoming COPs and had a role in them, in particular in the review of the activities and initiatives undertaken by member States on the topics of mitigation, adaptation, funding and technology, taking into account the priorities of the Arab region in coordination with political groups. A programme had been established to support Arab countries at the conferences, and invitations would be sent to countries to participate in cooperation with official delegates. Most attendees were specialized in the fields of environment, energy, civil aviation and agriculture. He added that it was important to secure funding for activities to reduce the losses and damages of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, and that successful initiatives implemented by Arab countries could be presented at global conferences to highlight countries' efforts to reduce the effects of climate change and identify the status of Arab countries compared with other countries.

42. The ESCWA Executive Secretary underlined that the issue of climate change cut across economic issues, and had implications for water, energy and agriculture. In its activities, ESCWA had moved to an

integrated approach combining the ministers of energy, water and agriculture from all Arab countries in partnership with the League of Arab States, which had begun to hold annual meetings on the topic. Arab countries were split into two groups: oil and gas exporters versus importers. The priorities of consuming countries were different from those of exporting countries, which meant that policymaking must take both groups into consideration. Arab countries received a great deal of funding, but the majority was in the form of loans not grants, which burdened countries. Funding was also aimed at mitigation rather than adaptation, without taking into account the importance of adaptation to the Arab region, so there needed to be a balance between grants and loans and between relief and adaptation.

2. Outcomes of the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (Agenda item 10)

43. With reference to document ESCWA/EC.8/2021/9, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat gave a presentation on the results of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021, its core messages and preparations for the next Forum in 2022. She said that the core messages addressed various themes, such as social protection: social protection systems needed structural changes and needed to be extended to all, including workers in the informal sector, and social inequalities also needed to be addressed while implementing reforms to support decent employment opportunities. On the topic of health and recovery from the pandemic, the Forum had highlighted the commitment to intensify efforts towards fair, equitable and simultaneous distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. On equality and peace, Forum participants had committed to enacting and implementing legislation aiming to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, expand women's representation and participation in all aspects of public life, and commit to working towards ending wars, conflicts and occupation. The Forum had also discussed the mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda, covering funding, technology, data and regional and international cooperation. They had adopted messages focusing on resource efficiency, international cooperation, reliance on digital technology and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the need to establish and strengthen data platforms to monitor progress in implementing the SDGs at the national and regional levels.

44. She mentioned that the main theme of the next Arab Forum would be consistent with the theme of the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which was "Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The next Arab Forum would be an opportunity to discuss Arab countries' efforts to recover from the pandemic, better prepare for other future crises that may be health-related or otherwise, put forward policy alternatives, and look at opportunities to build back better, with the 2030 Agenda as a key framework. She reviewed the various topics to be covered at the next Arab Forum, which aimed to strengthen coordination between ministries involved in pandemic recovery and propose frameworks for it, and to highlight promising practices and tools in the region for a comprehensive and sustainable recovery. ESCWA would issue a regional report addressing priority issues for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, with a statistical update of SDG indicators in the Arab region.

45. In the ensuing discussion, the representatives of Oman and Yemen addressed the issue of conflict, its multiplier effect on human development, and its implications on standards of living and social and economic conditions. They suggested that the issue be added to the topics to be discussed at the Arab Forum in 2022. The representative of Algeria said that his country was establishing a national framework for the follow-up of SDG indicators, and suggested standardizing the methodology of data on SDG indicators in ESCWA member States, building country capacity to disseminate statistical information within effective systems, and mobilizing additional financial resources to develop their statistical information systems.

46. In response, the ESCWA Executive Secretary stressed the secretariat's eagerness to hold workshops on the Arab Forum's sidelines on the issue of conflicts and their effects and implications for the region, adding that the topic was already being addressed at the Forum. She noted that the comments by the representative of Algeria had been addressed under agenda item 7.

3. *Regional preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference
on the Least Developed Countries*
(Agenda item 11)

47. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/10](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation in which he noted that the regional preparations comprised the measures launched by ESCWA to support the Arab LDCs in preparing for the Doha Conference. The aim of the regional process was to demonstrate progress made by member States over the past decade, identify difficulties, and focus on the vulnerabilities resulting from conflicts and institutional fragility. ESCWA had engaged its four LDCs, Arab donor States and organizations, and its preparatory process had resulted in a brief report on policies for the Arab LDCs that addressed progress made over the past decade and common and country-specific challenges. The report's findings included identifying challenges such as the failure of consumption-based growth in helping to develop sustainable productive sectors, increasing poverty levels, weakened State institutions and damaged basic infrastructure, which complicated people's access to water, energy and sanitation.

48. He underlined that climate crises were likely to increase in frequency and severity, which required including mitigation measures and addressing the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis through capacity-building and funding. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ranked second and fifth, respectively, among the main donors to Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman financed LDCs bilaterally through their national funds. ESCWA would organize two side meetings at the Doha Conference on climate risks in LDCs, and launch an initiative to activate the triple nexus approach in LDCs by linking humanitarian action, development and peace.

49. The representative of Yemen praised the ESCWA initiative, saying that it diagnosed the challenges of LDCs and had launched a graduation programme from the LDC category. He expressed his country's interest in the initiative. Yemen had participated in all meetings and had had plans to graduate from the LDC category in the prior decade, but the emergence of multiple challenges had led to a deterioration in the country's situation and prevented the implementation of those plans. A framework would hopefully be developed to activate the nexus approach linking relief, development and peace amid conflicts and crises. The representative of Mauritania noted that his country was facing problems with the education indicator and, in cooperation with the World Bank, had held a conference aimed at raising the level of education. Mauritania was also seeking to graduate from the LDC category. Being a gas and oil exporter would be an opportunity to raise income and finance social services, such as education and health.

50. The representative of the Sudan stressed the need for an operational programme to enable countries to graduate from the LDC category. The representative of Somalia thanked ESCWA for its initiative and said that the outcome of the fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries held in Istanbul had not been translated into action. He expressed his hope that the next conference would produce useful results that would take into account the circumstances of each country. Education was essential to tackling poverty and unemployment, and Somalia planned to host an education conference and requested support from ESCWA in that area.

51. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat stressed the importance of taking into account the characteristics and development priorities of each country, instead of applying a single methodology to achieve the desired results. ESCWA was working hard to help countries graduate from the LDC category, and offered support in that area through re-examining development challenges and taking into account the specificity of each group of countries.

D. Programmatic issues

1. Reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies (Agenda item 12)

52. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/11](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed the reports of six ESCWA subsidiary bodies that had held their sessions between the sixth and eighth meetings of the Executive Committee: the reports of the Committee on Transport and Logistics on its twentieth and twenty-first sessions; the reports of the Committee on Trade Policies in the States Members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on its first and second sessions; the report of the Committee on Financing for Development in the States Members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on its first session; the report of the Statistical Committee on its fourteenth session; the report of the Committee on Technology for Development on its third session; and the report of the Committee on Social Development on its thirteenth session. The most important findings and recommendations in those reports were presented.

53. The Executive Committee adopted the recommendations presented in the eight reports.

2. Proposed programme plan for 2023 (Agenda item 13)

54. Before addressing the programme plan, the ESCWA Executive Secretary noted the need to review the findings of the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2020–2021 and the expected trends for the region in 2022, to determine the broader context of the plan. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat then presented the key findings of the survey, underlining that the economic prospects of the Arab region were positive, although countries remained highly vulnerable to external shocks because of their heavy dependence on the export of hydrocarbons and their low economic diversification. The survey projected growing GDP, stable inflation and low unemployment rates in 2022 and 2023. As for tax reforms in the Arab region, the subject of that survey edition, those reforms (aimed at increasing tax rates) had not improved tax revenues, and many challenges had weakened their impact, such as tax exemptions, weak tax administration, numerous infractions and the low efficiency of tax systems in the region.

55. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Lebanon pointed out that the economic models used in the projections were not mentioned. Those models needed to be shown given the sensitivity and impact of the report. A paragraph could be added to the survey dealing with the impact of sanctions affecting many Arab countries and neighbouring countries, as with Lebanon being impacted by sanctions on the Syrian Arab Republic. The representative of Tunisia requested that 2019 be used to calculate growth instead of 2020, stressing the need to include tax policy on the agenda because of its importance to economic diversification, as well as the problems of double taxation, population ageing and resource depletion some countries would suffer in the near future. He asked about preparations for those challenges. The representative of Kuwait said that the report had focused excessively on increasing tax revenues, but there were States that did not apply taxes as a primary source of revenue, instead redefining local services and controlling expenditures. The representative of Oman praised the report, noting that it highlighted the challenges that ESCWA must work on in the future, in particular reducing poverty and unemployment, and increasing the quality of education and regulating tax. The representative of Yemen agreed, noting that the report was a window to the near future, and asked about the expected positive growth mentioned in the presentation. The figure was an average for the region as a whole, but did not mean that all countries would see positive growth, and some might even see negative growth.

56. The representative of the Sudan noted that inflation rates in his country were very high at 366 per cent, but the economic situation had been relatively stable since the December 2019 uprisings and the lifting of United States economic sanctions on the Sudan. He requested technical support in structural reforms to reduce the devaluation of the national currency, and present best practices from other countries that had suffered from

high inflation. The representative of Jordan praised the report's importance for decision-making, stating that his country's situation attested to the importance of tax reform, which had achieved significant practical results in 2021 and 2022. There remained a need to combat tax evasion and avoidance, and improve tax management.

57. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat confirmed that ESCWA was using United Nations data and approaches, while also integrating national historical data. The approach was standard and not aimed only at individual countries, but also at groups of countries. He confirmed that the report was detailed and contained answers to many of the questions of member States. The previous year's report had been based on 2019 data, so the current year's report had to start in 2020, and the current year's report was aimed at focusing more on the prospects for 2022–2023. He agreed with the importance of tax policy; the previous year's report had focused on the relationship between growth and debt, and the one before had focused on support systems associated with tax policies. In response to the representative of Kuwait, he said that taxes were required for countries that did not have the necessary means and resources. On inflation, he said that it was structural in some countries and circumstantial in others, and that inflation in the Sudan had become a structural problem. He agreed with the comments that development levels in Arab countries were highly vulnerable to external shocks, with the most affected being the poorest and most vulnerable; and underlined that the report touched on multidimensional poverty.

58. The Executive Secretary explained that the report was an annual survey prepared by all regional commissions for their regions, based on a global model that the United Nations had established. ESCWA had focused on projections on the principle that the future was more important than the past. It was preparing a report on the impact of sanctions on the Syrian Arab Republic, and the report could be extended to also include the impact of such sanctions on neighbouring countries. She added that the survey was produced in a standard format, but it also added a focus on a specific topic each year, with the current year being taxation; 136 countries had agreed on a 15 per cent tax on corporate profits while the report was in the process of being prepared, so ESCWA had begun preparing another report to be issued soon to analyse the impact of that decision on Arab countries.

59. She then briefly presented the ESCWA programme plan for 2023, which focused on strengthening cooperation between member States, sharing capacity-building experiences, and benefiting from best practices. ESCWA was examining major global trends and analysing their impact on the region, and would seek to focus on at least one of those major trends each year. The issue of ageing was expected to be a challenge in the coming years, and ESCWA would help member States develop strategies for ageing. ESCWA had activities to create additional financial space and special sources of support for heavily indebted countries. On the topic of water resources, she said that ESCWA had launched a discussion with the World Bank on groundwater and water uses. ESCWA would also help countries identify which dimensions of poverty to focus on, such as health and education, and develop appropriate indicators to measure multidimensional poverty, not just money-metric poverty. She underlined that ESCWA had continued its efforts in supporting gender equality, strengthening the role of women in public participation and the economic sector, and reducing violence against them. ESCWA had invested in a large data system to assist all Arab countries, collecting all the statistics produced by the United Nations for the region to benefit stakeholders. ESCWA had also invested in young people and in securing jobs for them, so that the economy could benefit from their knowledge and energy.

60. At the end of the item, participants adopted the proposed 2023 programme plan.

E. Date and venue of the ninth meeting of the Executive Committee (Agenda item 14)

61. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic offered to host the ninth meeting of the Executive Committee in her country. The Committee and the ESCWA secretariat took note of the request, with Syrian representatives to be contacted at a later time to make hosting arrangements.

F. Other matters
(Agenda item 15)

62. No issues were raised under this item.

III. Adoption of the recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its eighth meeting
(Agenda item 16)

63. At the close of its eighth meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the recommendations submitted to it as amended for inclusion in the present report.

IV. Organization of work

A. Venue and date

64. The Executive Committee held its eighth meeting in Amman on 23 and 24 December 2021. Pursuant to its terms of reference, which stipulate that the Chair of the ESCWA session shall be designated to chair the Executive Committee, the representative of Tunisia, in his capacity as Chair of the thirtieth session of ESCWA, was appointed Chair of the eighth meeting of the Executive Committee. The representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Qatar assumed the posts of Vice-Chairs, and the representative of the Sudan assumed the post of Rapporteur.

B. Opening

65. The Executive Committee opened its eighth meeting at 9 a.m. on Thursday, 23 December 2021. The representative of Tunisia, who was chairing the eighth meeting of the Executive Committee, Mr. Mohamed Ali Ben Habib, Deputy Ambassador at the Embassy of Tunisia in Jordan, addressed the economic, social and humanitarian implications of the COVID-19 crisis. He reviewed ESCWA estimates that thousands of lives had been lost as a result of the pandemic, that unemployment had worsened, and that the number of people in poverty had increased. The situation necessitated further activation of multilateral United Nations cooperation mechanisms to serve the Arab region and seriously address the debt burden dilemma, put it back on the agenda of development projects, and provide capacity-building support to rationalize development policies for economic and social recovery. He praised ESCWA for its various activities on supporting economic integration and highlighting the development financing needs of Arab countries. He also thanked ESCWA for its targeted support to strengthening social protection systems, and making them more sustainable and just. He underlined the need to pursue efforts to close the gaps in indicators and data necessary to assess and reform development policies and assess the impact of climate change on water and food security. He also commended the work of ESCWA in monitoring the practices of the Israeli occupation, and highlighting their implications for the living conditions of Palestinians.

66. Ms. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, made a statement on behalf of the ESCWA secretariat, in which she welcomed the accession of Algeria and Somalia to ESCWA. She said that ESCWA was transforming the knowledge it produced into practical tools that supported all Arab countries in making policy decisions to bring about tangible changes on the ground. The COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated the need for inclusiveness and solidarity in recovery policies, and the most important challenge was the issue of financing for development. The integrated efforts by ESCWA to support Arab countries in that area would be presented at the current meeting. ESCWA had developed various initiatives, such as the Climate-SDGs Debt Swap and Donor Nexus Initiative. In the face of the enormous challenges faced by the Arab region associated with natural resource management, she singled out the challenge of water and the required approaches based on regional cooperation. ESCWA supported any regional approach that provided fruitful solutions towards sustainable development; within the same framework, it supported countries' efforts to transition fairly to sustainable energy and adopt a circular carbon

economy to support that transition. In the light of current demographic changes, accelerated urbanization and growing inequality, there was an ever-greater need for solidarity and collective action to anticipate opportunities.

C. Participants

67. The eighth meeting of the Executive Committee was attended by representatives of 19 ESCWA member States. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. Agenda and organization of work

68. The Executive Committee adopted the agenda set out in document [E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/L.1](#).

Annex I

List of participants

Algeria

Mr. Murad Dahmani
Deputy Director of Cultural, Scientific and
Technical Affairs
Directorate-General for Multilateral Cooperation
and Cross-cutting Issues
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National
Community Abroad

Mr. Samir Basha
Second Secretary
Embassy of Algeria in Lebanon

Bahrain

Ambassador Ahmed Yousef al-Ruwei'i
Ambassador of Bahrain in Jordan

Mr. Mohammed Jaafar Abu Hammour
Director of Public Relations
Embassy of Bahrain in Jordan

Egypt

Mr. Hala al-Hudaydi
Second Secretary
Political Affairs Officer
Embassy of Egypt in Jordan

Iraq

Mr. Saher Abdul-Kadhimi Mahdi
Director General for International Cooperation
Ministry of Planning

Mr. Ammar Adel Shamil
Director of the Development Cooperation Unit
International Cooperation Department
Ministry of Planning

Jordan

Mr. Marwan al-Refai
Secretary-General of the Ministry of Planning and
International Cooperation
Ministry of Planning and International
Cooperation

Mr. Malek al-Breazat
Head of the Department of Arab and Islamic
Relations
Ministry of Planning and International
Cooperation

Kuwait

Mr. Saad Muhammad al-Rashidi
Acting Director for International Economic
Cooperation
Ministry of Finance

Lebanon

Mr. Alexander Muradian
Deputy Governor
Central Bank of Lebanon

Mr. Bilal Qablan
Department of Economic Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants

Mr. Georges Fadel
Deputy Chargé d'affaires
Embassy of Lebanon in Jordan

Mauritania

Mr. Mohammad Abdul-Rahman al-Dady
Assistant Director-General for Development
Strategies and Policies
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Promotion of
Productive Sectors

Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud Sheikhna
Section Chief
Directorate for Coordination of Accelerated
Growth and Common Well-being Strategy

Morocco

Mr. M'hammed Grine
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation
and Moroccan Expatriates
Embassy of Morocco in Lebanon

Mr. Al-Mahdi Bouanan
Deputy Ambassador
Embassy of Morocco in Lebanon

Oman

Mr. Saeed bin Rashid al-Qatabi
Director General of Social Sectors
Ministry of Economy

Mr. Ali bin Saeed bin Abdullah al-Jabri
Economic Agreements Specialist
Department of Arab and International
Organizations
Ministry of Economy

State of Palestine

Mr. Faisal Omar
Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister's Office

Mr. Mahmoud Ataya
Director General of Planning
Office of the Prime Minister

Qatar

Mr. Shaheen bin Ali Al Kaabi
Director of the International Cooperation
Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Mariam bint Abdul Rahman al-Jaber
Second Secretary
International Cooperation Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Faisal bin Ahmed Qattan
Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable
Development Affairs
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Ms. Adwa bint Mohamed Al-Banyan
Senior International Relations Specialist
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Somalia

Mr. Hassan Mohammed Ali
Director of International Organizations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Mr. Mustafa Adam Daqal
Director of the Arab Relations Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Mr. Mohammed Hussein Mohammed Sufi
Arab Relations Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Sudan

Ms. Ikhlas Mahjoub Ziadeh Sati
Department Director
Ministry of Trade and Supply

Mr. Issam Saad Allah Mirsal Hassan
Director of the Organizations Department
Ministry of Trade and Supply

Mr. Al-Hadi Jaafar al-Mansour
Statistician
Central Bank of Sudan

Syrian Arab Republic

Ms. Thouraya Idlebi
Deputy Head of the Planning and International
Cooperation Commission
Planning and International Cooperation
Commission

Mr. Mohsen Esmandar
Director of Cooperation with International
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Tunisia

Mr. Mohamed Ali Benhabib
Deputy Ambassador
Embassy of Tunisia in Jordan

Mr. Hossam El Din El Dakhil
Consul, Cultural Advisor
Embassy of Tunisia in Jordan

Ms. Farah Fawaz Mustafa Badwan
Director of the Tunisian Ambassador's Office
Embassy of Tunisia in Jordan

United Arab Emirates

Mr. Radad al-Qallab
Researcher
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Jordan

Mr. Omar Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani
Undersecretary of International Cooperation
Ministry of Planning and International
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Mr. Mohammed Ahmed al-Hawiri
Deputy Minister of Planning
Economic Studies and Forecasts Sector
Ministry of Planning and International
Cooperation

Annex II

List of documents

Title	Item	Symbol
Provisional agenda and annotations	2	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/L.1
Organization of work	2	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/L.2
Implementation of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its seventh meeting	3	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/3
Technical cooperation activities in 2021	4	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/4
Progress in administrative reforms in ESCWA	5	(Presentation to the secretariat)
ESCWA toolkit to support countries in designing integrated social policies	6	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/5 E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/8/Rev.2
Arab SDG Gateway	7	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/6
Arab Trade Gateway	8	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/7
Activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies	9	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/8
Outcomes of the 2021 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development	10	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/9
Regional preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries	11	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/10
Reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies	12	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/11
Proposed programme plan for 2023	13	E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/12
List of documents		E/ESCWA/EC.8/2021/INF.1